



Northwest Regional Office

NOAA Fisheries



National Marine Fisheries Service

News Release

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Fisheries Service Determines ESA Listing Not Warranted for Three Puget Sound Fish Species

The National Marine Fisheries Service announced that it has made a final decision that Endangered Species Act listings are not warranted for Pacific hake, Pacific cod, and walleye pollock populations from Puget Sound, Washington.

These are the first of several determinations that will address the ESA status of seven marine fish species in Puget Sound. After reviewing all scientific and commercial information, the agency determined that the petitioned populations are part of larger biological groupings that do not warrant protection under the ESA.

"Our scientific information tells us," said Donna Darm, acting head of the Fisheries Service's Northwest Region in Seattle, "that although there are uncertainties and concerns about the health of these Puget Sound populations, they are part of larger and relatively healthier population segments that do not warrant listing at this time."

However, NOAA Fisheries remains concerned about the status of Puget Sound/Gelofia Basin Pacific hake population and will retain it on its list of candidate species for future re-assessment.

The agency examined a number of factors likely responsible for the species' decline, including harvest, habitat alteration/degradation, ocean and climate changes, and marine mammal predation.

NOAA Fisheries scientists group marine fish into distinct population segments, or DPSs. DPSs are identified by reviewing ecological, biological and genetic information. They represent one of several biological groups that can be considered for ESA listing. The agency's scientists and their state and tribal counterparts have worked together to determine the DPSs and population health of Pacific hake, Pacific cod, and walleye pollock from Puget Sound to Southeast Alaska. NMFS determined that the Puget Sound populations are part of larger DPSs in the Northeastern Pacific Ocean.

(more)

(Puget Sound Fishes Not Warranted 2-2-2)

These ESA reviews were prompted by a February 1999 petition, which requested listings for 18 species of Puget Sound marine fish. The Fisheries Service said in June of that year that there was insufficient information on 11 of the species -- all varieties of bottom-dwelling rockfish -- to warrant a status review of them.

Puget Sound marine fish still under review are Pacific herring, and brown, copper and quillback rockfish. The results of these status reviews will be announced in February. If at that time the agency makes a formal proposal to list any of the four species, it would have another year to make a decision on a final ESA listing.

The petition was submitted by Sam Wright, a retired biologist with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. It involved the largest number of species the Fisheries Service has been asked to consider under the ESA.

NOAA Fisheries said it would continue to work closely with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington as it progresses with its status reviews.

The Federal Register notice announcing this action and other information on this topic will soon be available from the Northwest Region's Web page, at <http://www/nwr.noaa.gov>.

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